



IAAP partners with Ukrainian Rehab Center in Kyiv to promote resilience

Submitted by Judy Kuriansky

Consistent with IAAP's response to international crises, in accordance with our mandate with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and affiliation with the Department of Global Communications, and with the IAAP statement on the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the IAAP UN team is engaged in a unique partnership with a center on the ground in Ukraine, the Community Center for Psychological Support in Ukraine, Kyiv City Center for Social, Professional and Labor Rehabilitation of the Disabled, and with other partners in the United States, namely, Columbia University Teachers College (TC) and the Neuropsychology Center of Louisiana, founded by noted Neuropsychologist Dr. Darlyne Nemeth.

Considerable effort was extended by the IAAP team to find appropriate partners on the ground. During this process, contacts were made with innumerable Ukrainian organizations and importantly, a relationship was forged with the Polish Consulate General, at the Embassy of Poland to the United States, as well as meeting the Ukrainian Consulate General.

The Kyiv Center provides support for individuals with various conditions who are affected, vulnerable and at-risk, such as parents and children, elderly people, migrants and refugees, military personnel, victims of violence, persons with disabilities (either chronic or caused by the current war), persons suffering from the war or who have lost loved ones, survived captivity, torture or occupation, or have any physical or mental condition that could benefit from professional assistance in accordance with their rehabilitation programs.

IAAP's UN representative, Judy Kuriansky, has led the U.S. team, supported by four of her TC graduate students who are members of the IAAP Division 15 (Students and Early Career Psychologists). Her graduate students included Julia Maney and Caroline Burke, who are on the logistics and research team, and June Chang and Carl Tauberman, who led exercises (respectively, in t'ai chai and mediation). On behalf of Dr. Nemeth, Cody Capps assisted. The Ukrainian team consists of local psychologists on staff at the Kyiv Center, led by Oleksandr Zharkov, and including Dmytro Tytula and Iryna Zhevelyova. The Kyiv Center was founded by international humanitarian Dr. Rajiv Fernando and is supported by his charitable organizations Chiraj and Heal Corps. Dr. Kuriansky has also made donations on behalf of IAAP.

The partners have conducted three workshops for the Kyiv Center, with the U.S. contributions translated by the Ukraine team. The first workshop, held on April 14, 2023, was open to patients

at the Center and other participants, and included didactic and experiential elements and techniques to reduce stress and fears caused by the current situation. Dr. Fernando and the Director of the Center Oksana Verbovska made introductory remarks. Participants ($N=53$), were from 28 to 61 years old. The survey results showed that participants of the program noted improvement in their life and work, positive attitude, and the ability to focus and think logically. Overall, 92% of participants felt the techniques were helpful in easing fears and anxiety, and 86% reported they would like to participate in similar future training sessions/lectures.

A second training was held on June 9, 2023, targeted specifically to 15 female patients of the Center who were suffering from the impact of the war but also from cancer, to specifically serve that population. Similar to the first intervention, resilience techniques were presented, though targeted to the specific condition. Pre-post assessment scores revealed positive changes, and respondents reported high usefulness of the activities (up to 9 out of 10 on a progressive scale). The women found art therapy techniques, including drawing mandalas (the expertise of Dmytro Tytula) valuable for calmness and inner strength, and the “Draw-A-Bridge activity that Dr. Kuriansky has used effectively around the world to reveal emotions and direction for healing.

The third workshop was held on August 23, 2023, the day before Ukraine Independence Day, specifically for veterans and their families. Using the train-the-trainers model, the American team trained the Ukrainian team in three specific techniques, addressing resilience that Dr. Kuriansky has used around the world, a guided imagery designed by Dr. Nemeth, and a mediation mindfulness technique used by the military, designed by Carl Tauberman, himself a vet. All the techniques were designed, and deemed, to be culturally appropriate.

The workshops were accredited by the World Council for Psychotherapy, for which Dr. Nemeth is Secretary-General.

“We in America are honored to work with the brilliant Ukrainian team of the Kyiv Center and Chiraj, to show our solidarity and commitment to the people and soldiers of Ukraine, and to share our techniques that have been useful around the world in trauma and war zones,” says internationally known psychologist **Judy Kuriansky**, a Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University Teachers College and United Nations representative for IAAP. The daughter of an Army Colonel whose grandparents emigrated from Odessa to the United States, Kuriansky has a deep connection to the country and vets of Ukraine. She has conducted psychosocial support trainings and workshops all over the world during and after disasters. “My activities of the ‘resilience ball’ ‘finger lock’ ‘contact comfort’ and ‘draw-a-bridge’ have all helped participants focus on post-traumatic growth instead of the typical focus on PTSD.”

By the end of the year, 43,000 clients of the Kyiv City Center for Social, Professional and Labor Rehabilitation of the Disabled will be able to view the videos of the interventions.

The ongoing collaboration is a testament to the solidarity of IAAP with Ukraine.